

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Please bring this action to the attention of the person in your section responsible for outreach work as it is felt that appeals from journalists' organizations, church bodies and trade unions for the relevant cases may be particularly effective.

UA 86/92

Legal concern

12 March 1992

MALAWI

Simon MHONE, journalist

Sydney KWELEPETA, employee of Export Promotion

Council

Sam CHIRWA, employee of Malawi Oil Company (Oilcom)

Mr CHIRAMBO, employee of Blantyre Polytechnic

Archbishop James CHIONA, Roman Catholic Archbishop of
Blantyre

Bishop F MKHORI }

Bishop M A CHIMOLE }

Bishop A ASSOLARI } Roman Catholic bishops

Bishop A CHAMGWERA }

Bishop G M CHISENDERA }

Monsignor John ROCHE, Roman Catholic priest

Chakufwa CHIHANA, trade union official

Amnesty International is concerned about the above named who have been arrested in Malawi for urging the introduction of a multi-party political system. The first four named reportedly remain in detention, apparently without charge. Archbishop James Chiona and the other members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and Chakufwa Chihana, an international trade union official, were detained briefly by police and released without charge, although the bishops' movements may still be restricted.

Simon Mhone, a journalist formerly employed by the government Department of Information, was reportedly arrested in December 1991 after he had contributed news reports to the international news agency Reuters. Sydney Kwelepeta of the Malawi Export Promotion Council was reportedly arrested at about the same time after he had been overheard in a Blantyre hotel arguing against the existing single-party political system. Sam Chirwa of Oilcom was reportedly arrested during the week beginning 24 February 1992 after he had been overheard in his office advocating a multi-party system. Mr Chirambo was arrested at about the same time after he had been overheard in a bar expressing similar sentiments. Amnesty International has received reports of a student at Blantyre Polytechnic arrested for the same reason in late February, although his name is not yet known.

Chakufwa Chihana, the secretary general of the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC), was arrested at Namitete Bridge on the Malawi-Zambia border on 1 March 1992, as he was leaving the country to attend a trade union meeting. He was detained for six hours and questioned by security police. A former prisoner of conscience detained without charge for several years in the 1970s, he has emerged as a prominent representative

of those advocating political change in Malawi.

Archbishop Chiona, the five other bishops and Mgr Roche were the signatories of a Lenten pastoral letter read out in Roman Catholic churches across the country on Sunday 8 March 1992, which criticized the government's human rights record. On 10 March, they were summoned to police headquarters in Blantyre and reportedly questioned for eight hours. According to one report, since their release they have all been restricted to the Archbishop's House in Blantyre. Another report suggests that representatives of other Christian denominations have also been summoned for questioning by the police.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Malawi is a one-party state which has been governed since independence in 1964 by Life-President Dr H. Kamuzu Banda. The control of the ruling Malawi Congress Party over political life is complete, with extensive networks of informers reporting upon anyone who expresses dissenting views. Indefinite detention without charge or trial is permitted under the Public Security Regulations and is frequently invoked. The government has responded to international criticism of its human rights record by releasing about 90 political detainees during 1991 and others - possibly as many as 50 - in January 1992. However, Amnesty International has information about more than 20 remaining long-term detainees and the total number of political prisoners is probably much greater.

There has been little indication that the government envisages any liberalization of political debate, but informal public discussion of multi-party politics has increased in recent weeks. The Roman Catholic bishops' pastoral letter, which criticized government restrictions on freedom of speech and other aspects of its human rights record, was the first public criticism within the country in more than a quarter of a century. The authorities have reportedly ordered that citizens hand in any copies of the letter - more than 16,000 were printed. Unofficial tracts are suddenly circulating, calling for an end to the one-party system and drawing attention to detention and unlawful killings of government opponents.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the reported arrest and continuing detention of Simon Mhone, Sydney Kwelepeta, Sam Chirwa and Mr Chirambo. Seeking information about their place of detention and the legal basis for their imprisonment and calling for them to be released unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought promptly and fairly to trial;

- expressing concern at the arrest and brief detention of Chakufwa Chihana and Archbishop Chiona and other members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Stating that it appears that they were detained solely for their advocacy of a multi-party system and their criticism of human rights violations. Seeking assurances that they are under no form of continuing restriction and that neither they nor other members of the Malawian churches will be detained for the expression of their opinions;

- seeking assurances that no one will be arrested and prosecuted for possession of the Lenten pastoral letter, which is a non-violent expression of religious and political opinions.

APPEALS TO

1) H E The Life-President Ngwazi Dr H. Kamuzu Banda
Office of the President and Cabinet
P/Bag 301
Lilongwe 3

Your Excellency

Malawi

Telegrams: Life-President Banda Lilongwe, Malawi

Telexes: 4389 PRES MI

2) Hon. J Z U Tembo

Minister of State in the Office of the President

P/Bag 301

Lilongwe 3

Malawi

Telegrams: Minister of State Tembo, Lilongwe, Malawi

Dear Minister

3) Mr MacWilliam Lunguzi

Inspector-General of Police

P/Bag 305

Lilongwe 3

Malawi

Telegrams: Inspector-General of Police Lunguzi, Lilongwe, Malawi

Dear Sir

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Most Reverend James Chiona

Archbishop of Blantyre

PO Box 385

Blantyre

Malawi

Southern Africa Trade Union

Co-ordination Council

PO Box 1271

Lilongwe

Malawi

The Editor

Odini

PO Box 133

Lilongwe

Malawi

and to diplomatic representatives of Malawi in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 April 1992.